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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7109
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7075
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9696
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5614
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5518
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1638
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6594
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 001267

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: THAI MFA CLARIFIES ASEAN STATEMENT ON ASSK; AIPMC
TRIES TO KEEP PRESSURE ON BURMESE REGIME

REF: BANGKOK 1219 (CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT)

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Classified By: POL Counselor George Kent, reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In response to Burmese criticism of the May 18 ASEAN Chair Statement calling for Aung Saan Suu Kyi's (ASSK) release (reftel), the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released a clarification May 26 (text below). The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) convened in Thailand, released a statement May 25, and held a press conference May 26 calling on ASEAN to suspend Burma's ASEAN membership and to impose targeted sanctions on the military regime's generals in the absence of progress.

¶2. (C) Comment: The sniping between the Burmese and the Thai ASEAN Chair underscores the difficulty ASEAN faces in attempting to hold member states accountable to the norms embodied in the ASEAN Charter. As ASEAN attempts to fashion itself as a more people-centered organization, voices like the activist parliamentarians of the AIPMC may play an increasing role in the public discourse, but it remains unclear whether AIPMC will have any influence on the foreign policy of member states towards Burma. End Summary and Comment.

MFA CLARIFYING STATEMENT

¶3. (SBU) The May 26 Thai clarification of the May 18 ASEAN Chairman's Statement came in the wake of Burmese criticism in the New Light of Myanmar and other Burmese state-run media that strongly rejected the May 18 Chairman's Statement as not conforming with ASEAN practice and interfering with the internal affairs of Burma. The Thai MFA responded as follows:

BEGIN TEXT:

-The ASEAN Chairman's Statement on Daw Aung Suu Kyi was issued with the best of intentions towards Myanmar and reflects the desire for the process of national reconciliation in Myanmar to move forward on the basis of inclusiveness, with the participation of all sectors of society. Thailand, in its capacity as the current ASEAN Chairman, shall continue to pursue constructive dialogue with the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

-According to ASEAN's practice, a Joint ASEAN Statement is a negotiated text, which is prepared by ASEAN officials and approved by the ASEAN Foreign Ministries or the ASEAN Heads of State/Government. An ASEAN Chairman's Statement, however, is issued by the Government which is the current Chair of ASEAN, without the need for joint drafting by the ASEAN officials.

-In this case, the ASEAN Senior Officials had discussed this issue and expressed views on the recent developments on 18th May 2009 and agreed that Thailand, as the current ASEAN Chair, should issue the ASEAN Chairman's Statement on recent developments about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reflecting the views expressed in the SOM Meeting and to inform other ASEAN Foreign Ministries accordingly. Similar action had previously been taken before.

END TEXT.

AIPMC CALLS FOR SUSPENSION OF BURMA (IF NO PROGRESS)

¶4. (SBU) Members of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), consisting of parliamentarians from Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, met on May 25 to discuss ASSK's recent arrest and trial, coupled with the regime's (lack of) progress toward national reconciliation, democracy and human rights. The AIPMC released a statement calling on ASEAN to suspend Burma's membership from ASEAN if the regime continued to detain ASSK.

The AIPMC also urged ASEAN member states to consider imposing targeted sanctions on the military regime's generals, should they fail to respect the ASEAN Charter and continue to oppress the Burmese people.

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¶5. (SBU) During a question-and-answer session at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand May 26, Thai MP and AIPMC Chair Kraissak Choonhavan remarked that Thai PM Abhisit had condemned the arrest and trial of ASSK, something that no other Thai Prime Minister had done before. Kraissak said he and others were campaigning to bring Burmese leaders to the International Criminal Court (ICC). He supported the proposed suspension of Burma from ASEAN because it was not worth keeping a "rogue" in the Association.

¶6. (SBU) Singaporean MP Charles Chong noted that, upon Burma's accession into ASEAN in 1997, there was an expectation that ASEAN could influence Burma positively. That hope had failed, along with the policy of constructive engagement behind closed doors. It was necessary now to discuss the idea of suspending Burma from ASEAN, he asserted.

Parliamentarian Lim Kit Siang of Malaysia stated that ASSK's "sham trial in a kangaroo court" was completely unacceptable.

ASEAN should take tougher measures, such as suspending Burma's ASEAN membership and possibly considering targeted sanctions. ASEAN member states should move towards mobilizing public opinion towards a harder line against the Burmese regime, in his view.

JOHN